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DIVERGENCE OF CALVINISM

FROM

PAULINE DOCTRINE.

BY

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IT is with the greatest unwillingness that Christians, who look all round in religion, ever give assent to the Calvinistic doctrine of Election; which, however, is Lutheran and Augustinian, not Calvin's only. Election, as reasoned out in the ninth chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans, if interpreted as by Calvin, seems to turn God into the ideal of hideous injustice, and to overthrow all moral ground of homage. It is not wonderful that in every university Christian students arise who struggle for another interpretation of the apostle's words; and, in general, the attempt is made to show that the election, on which he dwells, is not an election of individuals to salvation and glory, but the election of a nation to the performance of a work. If such an interpretation could be made grammatically consistent, it may be regarded as certain that the entire Christian Church would long since have joyfully embraced it; for the opposite view is alike distressing and pernicious. What is called the Arminian interpretation is

in direct contrariety to chapter viii., which chapter ix. continues and justifies. In chapter viii. nothing is clearer than that the elect are individuals, and that they are first foreknown, therefore predestined, therefore called, therefore justified, therefore glorified. A second attempt to evade the unpalatable inferences, is by saying that the first step in the series was a foreknowing that the individuals would be meritorious. This second effort of Arminianism equally fails; first, because in chapter ix. it is insisted that the election of Jacob over Esau took place before the children had done good or evil (clearly implying that their relative merit did not affect the election); secondly, because the interpretation lays self-righteousness as the basis against the whole current of the epistle; thirdly, because, in fact, there is no sharp separation of human merit into two classes, such that a Being who foreknew it could justly resolve to glorify one portion of mankind eternally, and eternally punish the rest. In the result, Arminianism is scarcely less offensive to common sense and common conscience than Calvinism; since it upholds what is the nucleus of the whole difficulty—the doctrine of an eternal Hell, which, with eternal Misery, implies eternal and ever-growing Sin, and a signal permanent triumph of Evil over Good in the works of the Creator. What avails it then to call Him Almighty, All-knowing, and All-loving?

When we discern the nucleus of offence to reside in this point, it is natural to ask how it was that Paul did not see and feel it.

On reaching chapter xi. of the epistle, we find just the reverse of what an English reader (possessed by the doctrine of Hell) expects. Not only does the apostle insist that in every age there has been an election *out of* Israel, all through the time in which

collective Israel was cast aside ; but he *authoritatively reveals* an after-mystery, which is to be accomplished when the fulness of the Gentiles is come in—namely, Universal Salvation is to follow. In the contemplation of this blessed result, the apostle reaches final satisfaction of heart and conscience, and bursts into admiration of the mercy and wisdom of God, as if in perfect ignorance that any doctrine of an eternal Hell could embarrass any of his readers. Does not this force us to ask what right we have to suppose that Hell was, in Paul's day, a part of the Evangel, or Good News ?

The advocates of an Eternal Hell are very strong in their logic, while resting on Matt. xxv. 46, "These shall go away into eternal (aionian) punishment, and the righteous into life eternal (aionian)." It is argued :—"All agree that the life of the righteous is to be absolutely eternal, so, then, is the punishment of the other side: the doom of each is *aionian* ; it is then commensurate, coeval, by parallelism of the clauses." Let this be granted, yet what is it to Paul ? Had he ever read the chapter ? There is no just reason for believing that our Gospel of Matthew was in existence till long after Paul's death. On the other hand, the logic is at least as forcible when applied to parallel clauses in Paul ; "God hath concluded ALL in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon ALL." By universal confession the former clause was intended by Paul to apply to all nations and every individual : "For there is *no difference* ; for ALL have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Obviously then, the ALL in the second clause is co-extensive with the ALL in the first, and cannot in any way be confined to an elect portion. Indeed, any attempt so to confine it makes void the contemplated satisfaction and profound homage with which the apostle winds up. We must conclude therefore, so

far as the evidence of this epistle goes, that the destruction of God's enemies, in which Paul believed, was an event in time, wholly transitory, and to be followed by the day of restitution and universal salvation; and that the opposite idea has been unduly obtruded on Paul from writings of later date. In the first epistle to the Corinthians the same doctrine appears. Christ is to come in glory, to receive to himself his dead and living saints at a First Resurrection, is to reign until all enemies are destroyed (among whom *Death* is included, and much more therefore *Sin*), and after he has thus subjected ALL things to God, he is to become subject himself, that God may be ALL (and) in ALL. This is the intense opposite of Arminianism, as well as of Calvinism. It is more like the Oriental idea of the absorption of all things into the Deity. It makes the Sonship of Christ anything but a state co-eternal, according to Athanasius, with the Divine existence, or an essence implying equality with God. Nay, this Sonship is in Paul a state assumed for a purpose, and laid aside when the purpose is fulfilled—the purpose, namely, of restoring all things into harmonious obedience to the Universal Father. To sum up: in Paul's view, all being sinful, and through sin liable to death, no one was injured by being passed over in election; guilty men, who are violently destroyed, do but meet a just doom; but when the reign of Christ, with his risen saints (1 Cor. vi. 2), shall at length have brought in the fulness of the Gentiles, a universal reconciliation is obtained. In the Apocalypse we read, "Blessed and holy is he who hath part (Rev. xx. 6) in the First Resurrection;" and Paul to the Philippians says, "If by any means I might attain to the Resurrection of the dead;" which may lead one to believe that he expected a *Second* and *Final* Resurrection, though he does not definitely say it, in the eleventh of Romans.

The Christian doctrine of Hell rests on the first three Gospels, and on the Apocalypse: but in the Apocalypse the solid imagery is figurative. The Beast and False Prophet, who are destined to eternal flames and torment, are not persons, but systems—Tyranny and Priestcraft, and perhaps it is unjust to press the doctrine further. But I see not how it can be denied by historical criticism, that the three Gospels (so called) have in this respect added to, and disastrously damaged, the original Gospel as known to Paul, and sent forth to the world a spurious representation of the message of Salvation and the Gospel of the Kingdom. The enigmatical teaching in which Jesus indulged, may have been the fatal cause; but (account for it as you will) mankind (whom the Gospel was to enlighten) have not yet had a fair chance of knowing what the Gospel was.

On discovering how the doctrine of Hell was fastened on to Christianity in the second age, after the death of Paul, it is inevitable to cast an eye backward, and ask what was its origin? It was not part of Mosaism, future life was a doctrine unknown even to Hezekiah, and first rose into belief among the Jews, as confined to the righteous. Nay, in the fourth Gospel, "I will raise him up at the last day," is equivalent to "I will *save* him"—resurrection of the wicked being an idea or thought absent from the mind. Since the doctrine of Tartarus was Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Etruscan, and apparently Oriental; since the Jews, before their dispersion, had no belief in it, and only after the cessation of prophecy received it during their contact with the heathen, and even then it was no part of the national Creed (for the Sadducees rejected entirely the very foundation, and the Pharisees were free to believe future existence in any such form as commended itself to their consciences); there is no escape from the conclusion, that

the doctrine (whatever it was), into which Jesus and the twelve apostles grew up concerning future resurrection and judgment, had been imbibed from the surrounding nations. The doctrine of Hell has no pretence of Jewish inspiration and revelation any more than Christian. Whether true or false, it is Pagan in origin; and now has become the weight which will totally sink Christianity, if it cannot be cut away. Of course I see clearly *why* Christians, who shudder at it, are so slow to rid themselves of it: they can only do so, by confessing writings called canonical to be the nidus of pernicious error. By an obstinate clinging to a sacred letter, they sustain the fatal divisions of Protestantism. Not until the pretensions of the letter are rejected, will it be possible for that spirituality which is the glory of Christianity, to rally into union for the purification and ennoblement of the world.



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